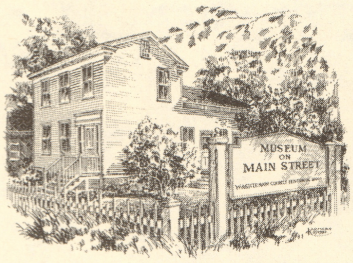

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857 • MARCH 2006

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INFORMATION

Published Seven Times A Year From September-May.

Museum On Main Street
500 N. Main Street at Beakes Street
Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

Phone: 734.662.9092
Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net
Web Site:
www.washtenawhistory.org

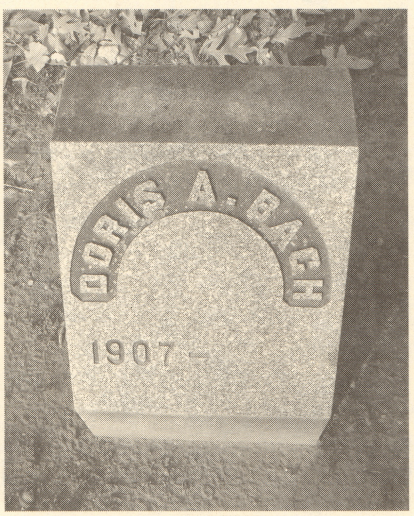
Annual dues: January-December individual, $15; couple/family $25; student or senior (60+) $10; senior couple $19; business/association $50; patron $100.

JUDITH CHRISMAN • PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Antiques Appraisal Fundraiser Approaching Fast!

The Society will be holding an Antiques Appraisal as a fund raiser on Saturday, May 6 at the Dixboro United Methodist Church at 5221 Church St just off Plymouth Road, just east of Cherry Hill Road. Representatives from the duMouchelle Gallery will be available from 10 am to 3 pm with a half-hour break at 12:30. Members of the public may bring a maximum of three items that can be carried to be appraised. Verbal appraisals will be $10.00 each, written appraisals $15.00.

In preparing the annual report, we inadvertently neglected to mention that two of our members gave donations that were matched by Pfizer. In addition, we received several donations if memory of Lawrence Ziegler. WCHS was listed by his family as a suggestion for memorial donations. The Society is very pleased to receive memorial or matching donations and encourages our readers to consider it in the future.



The gravestone of Doris Anna Bach, to be inscribed with her death date by the WCHS.

It was recently discovered by our board member, Susan Wineberg, that the gravestone of Doris Anna Bach (see photo) in Forest Hill Cemetery was never inscribed with her date of death. Upon further inquiry, we found that she was not buried there although it was stipulated in her will. Her generosity has allowed the Museum on Main Street to become what it is today and we feel that we are her "next of kin". Therefore, the Board of Directors has decided to arrange for her interment and the carving of the gravestone in honor of the Bach family and their contributions to the city and to the Society. We are planning to have a small ceremony in her honor at the time of interment. The date will be decided at the next board meeting.

Who Are They?

This 1921 local photo taken by one "Thomas" shows a doleful group of, apparently, schoolchildren and includes seven gigantic hairbows, three pairs of enormous round spectacles, and only 1 and 1/2 smiles. But who were they? Can any kind reader identify these children?

GRACE SHACKMAN AND PATRICIA MAHJER • SPEAKERS
LAURA BIEN

Cobblestone Structures Of Washtenaw County

"One would say that the settlers of Washtenaw County got off to a rocky start."

So said local history enthusiast Ralph Beebe, in introducing local historian Grace Shackman and EMU historical preservation program graduate Patricia Majher. The duo gave a joint talk on cobblestone structures to 70-plus attendees at WCHS's program at Cobblestone Farm barn on February 19.

Note: in a few spots where the tape recording was indistinct, remarks have been slightly paraphrased.

Grace: I'm going to start and give you some background on what cobblestone structures are, though I imagine most of you know already; and how they started in New York; and then in Michigan; the 12 known examples in this county; and then we're going to end up talking about some in Ontario, in case you want to go up and and see some other examples.

How many people here live in cobbletone houses? I know one…is that all? Only one…I was hoping some people might show up who know more than we do. I wanted to say that of the houses in Washtenaw County, we know a lot about some of them, but some of them we just know that they're there, and who owned the land during the time that they were there. When you do research and you find out who owns the land, then sometimes you don't know when the house was built. Sometimes we know who owned the land but nothing more than that.

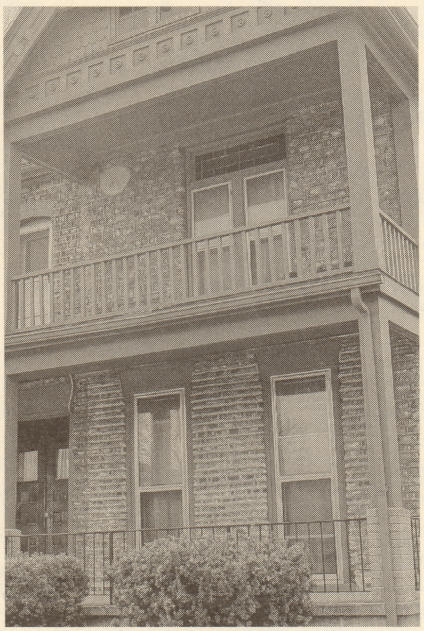
We'll tell you what we do know and what we don't know.

We have a handout over there that's got all the addresses [see p. 6 & 7]. I want to urge people—if you feel like driving around and looking at some, just stay out on the public right of way; don't bother people trying to live their normal lives.

Here is a picture of one, a cobblestone house, and the next slide..well first of all, those aren't cobbles. Cobbles you can hold with two fingers. And they're not boulders that take two hands to pick up. The definition is: a size that you can hold in your hand. I used to be on the Cobblestone [Farm] board; I can't believe it, twenty years ago, 1985. The definition of a cobblestone is [holds up a mango-sized cobblestone] these size stones, and they're put in a very purposeful pattern. One key thing is that they're three dimensional; they're not put in flat—they're put in so they stick out, and so particularly when the sun is shining, they just make gorgeous patterns. They're put in a design, and not randomly at all.

In New York State, right after the Erie Canal, here is a barn built in the 1850s, the same time as the [local] cobblestone houses. See how the bigger stones—they're put flat, all the way in; so, that's not a cobblestone. That's just a stone barn. And then, go to the next slide: this is a 20th-century example of of a stone building, one in Ypsilanti. But not in careful rows or anything.

OK, keep going…now we come to the Erie Canal. What's really neat about cobblestone buildings is that they were invented when three things came together at the right time. First, New York State had lots of cobblestones because of glaciers in the area; they had both fieldstones and stones that had been washed and swooped down by the water.



Ypsilanti's Miles House at 219 N. Huron shows a stone façade obscured by a later Queen Anne wooden addition.

Second, the Erie Canal was done in 1825. Then you had people who suddenly had a lot more money than before the canal was built, because, if you think about it, before the canal was built they could only sell their farm stuff to people around them, who probably didn't need it because they were all farmers too. But once the canal was built, they could send all their farm things down the canal to other NY cities, and even to Europe, so they were getting so much more money all of a sudden that they could afford to hire people to build their houses. So even though the materials were free, the labor was very expensive, and it could take

years, literally years, to build because each stone is laid one by one by one. You could only so many in a day, and even if you could go a little faster, that just wasn't going to do it. There was also something to do with the kind of cement they used at that time with the limestone [addition]—the cement they would use today would be the kind to buckle out.

And the third element was the stonemasons. There were all these unemployed stonemasons because the Erie Canal had just got done. So the Erie Canal stonemasons kept working, because they were making a lot of repairs to the canal. In earlier periods there were stonemasons from Ireland and from Europe, lots of stonemasons. There's some really early books written on cobblestone architecture. In 1944, a guy named Carl Smith noticed that there were clusters of houses in a neighborhood that would be sort of similar, so there must have been a lot of discussions among stonemasons about how to do this. He wrote a book in 1944, and he talks about talking to old men and women who remember when they were built. They stopped building them around the Civil War, but in the 1920s there were still these people that were still alive when they were building them. So they talked about stonemasons, and how some of them had different methods of building. Also, these people talked about how they hired these kids to go collect stones and sometimes they were neighborhood affairs, when the whole neighborhood would be invited to come collect stones for days, and at the end of the day they'd have food, and dancing, and stuff, sort of like a barn-raising only they were building a cobblestone house. So New York State is where you go if you really want to get into cobblestones.

In this slide, quite a few years ago, like 20 years ago, my uncle and my daughter Leah visited a cobblestone museum in New York, coming back from my cousin's wedding, and at this museum in New York state, along the Erie Canal, they had started their historical society when the cobblestone church was about to be torn down. Some volunteers started it, and they saved the church and bought some other cobblestone buildings. You can really see some prime, neat cobblestone architecture. That's the school, one of the old schools that was built; the first slide shows another part of the house, built with a little more casual cobblestone. In this slide there's a main road along the canal; I think it's called route 104, and it was used by Indians, too, and you drive along there, and you see that every other house is a cobblestone house. I kept saying, "Stop the car! Stop the car! I want to take a picture!"

At one point you'll see a cobblestone trailer park [audience laughter]. This is an antique store that's a cobblestone bulding, and then one—I guess this is a fire-house; this is just a drop in the bucket. There are cobblestone gas stations. In New York state, you'll see just all kinds of fantastic cobblestone buildings. All different fancy designs and everything. This just gives you a taste of it.

Patricia: The cobblestones began in Michigan during the Pleistocene Epoch, which began about two million years ago. During that period, an ice cap advanced south, as far south as St. Louis, Missouri. The movement of that ice cap scoured the soil and exposed the bedrock, and then crushed that to a rocky residue. When the ice cap made its final retreat 10,000 years ago, that residue was left behind. Within the residue are the stones that we now call cobblestones.

There are really two kinds of cobblestones. The ice-laid cobblestones have rough edges, and they're usually found at or just underneath the soil. The water-laid cobblestones are smooth; they're like skipping stones. They are found in lakes and rivers. Most of the ones you saw in the New York examples are the water-laid; they have that smooth, almost artificial look; I mean, they're almost perfect. In Michigan in general, and certainly in our county, you get a mix.

Cobblestones are found in many sections of Michigan, especially in sections that have both hills and rivers. But the cobblestone buildings we're discussing today are only found in the lower three tiers of counties, east of Battle Creek, so they don't extend all the way to Lake Michigan. Why is this? Why don't we find 19th-century cobblestone buildings in the upper peninsula or in the upper part of the lower peninsula?

The answer has three parts. One is, we have the terrain down here that's conducive to it, one is that in our lower peninsula settlement generally occurs from south to north, and the third is that the period of cobblestone construction in Michigan, which was 1830 to 1860, occurred before significant settlement in the northern part of our state occurred.

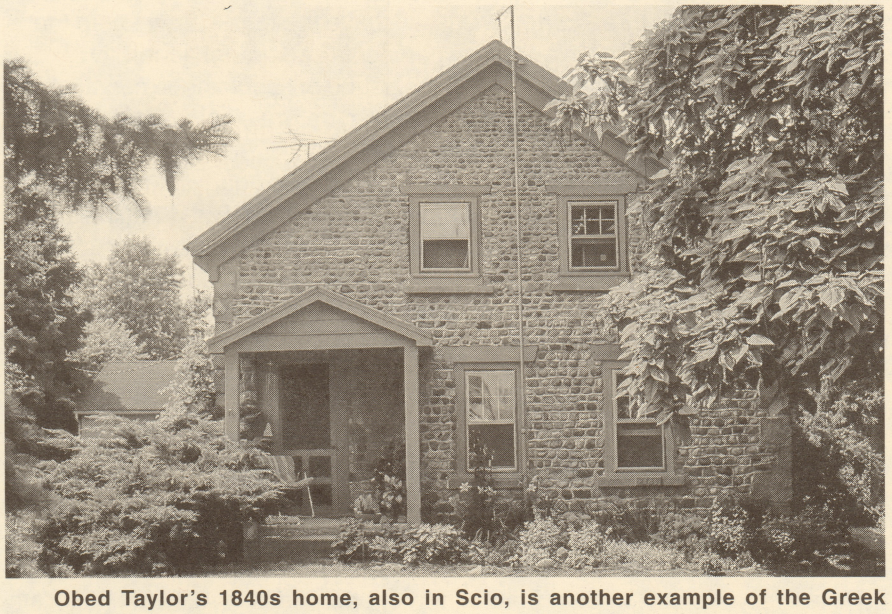
It's unclear how many buildings were built in Michigan. There are three houses, a school, and a church that have disappeared. But 40 still stand in the lower portion of our state, predominantly in our county, Washtenaw county, which has 12, Oakland county, which has 7, and Jackson county, which has 6. Then it's just a bit more scattered after that, one per county as you head out this way [gestures on map of the lower tier of lower-peninsular counties].

Nothing interesting in the Lansing area. And there's a couple in Calhoun county, in Hillsdale, one in Monroe, and three in Lenewee. Nothing in Wayne. And that's probably because it's a low-lying area without much in the way of hills. Of these 40 existing structures, most of them were originally intended to be residences, but 3 of them were schools, and there is a commercial building. It's still standing, and it's still being used. It was a fire station in Rochester, and now it's a bakery. 2 of the original 40 have been turned into commercial buildings. One is in Homer, a funeral home, and one is in Auburn Hills, it's a

bed and breakfast. And two of the homes are now museums, the Ticknor house, and one in Hillsdale. None of the schools that were originally built for that purpose is still a school. There's one in Macon, that's a private residence, and the other two are private buildings.

The number of cobblestone buildings in the United States and in Ontario varies; you see numbers ranging from 700 to 900. but about 90% of them are in New York state. But Michigan has the second highest quantity, after New York state. So we have more than Ontario. The earliest surviving structure in Michigan is the back section of Michigan's White house, that's the house just across from Huron high school. That was built in 1836. The latest structure, also called the White house, in Battle Creek, was built in 1868, so [cobblestone structures were built in the] 1830s to 1860s. The majority of buildings that we have established dates for were built in the 1840s.

The stolid 1840s Burnett House in Scio Township offers an example of Greek Revival architecture.



Obed Taylor's 1840s home, also in Scio, is another example of the Greek Revival style.

Architecturally speaking, Michigan's eastern examples tend to be Federal, or Greek Revival. The western examples tend to be Greek Revival or Italianate. Overall about 70% are Greek Revival, with some variation.

The New York connection is very strong; about 80% [of home builders] emigrated from New York, and other states of New England. We don't know much about the masons who erected the buildings in Michigan. The Ticknor house, the White house in Ann Arbor and the three which were built in Hillsdale are thought to have the same masons. Other connections might be made, but we're just not sure who constructed what. And this house in Washtenaw county, the Alvord house, has a relationship to these houses visually which is that they're not all cobblestone; they'll have a side of cobblestone, with a side of fieldstone. Just because of their proximity I wonder if there's a connection that we're just not aware of right now.

Here's a sampling of just two counties' worth. This is the Osgood house in Monroe county. It's the only one in Monroe county from the cobblestone era, but it has an extension which is cobblestaone as well. This is a very flat area, but it's right next to a creek, and there are a couple of other houses in the area that have cobblestone foundations. Even though Monroe county like Wayne is very flat, they did indeed find enough [cobblestones]. The next 3 slides are in Lenawee county. This is the Wheeler house and it reminds me of some of the ones in New York state. And it has a porch, it's very unusual and it's quite a tall structure; it's along M-50. This is one of the schoolhouses, this is in Macon. This is an example, what's called the Gelman House, on the left side and on the upper stories, you can see the cobblestone.

Grace: Benajah Ticknor and his brother Heman [of Cobblestone Farm/Ticknor house] were from eastern New York, and also the builder was from New York City. The Ticknor and the White house carry a pattern of cobblestones on the front, so they're very distinctive. The Ticknor house represents the pattern of laying stones that is common even in New York state, which is you take your best stones, or your best patterns, and you put that on the front of the house. On the side, some stones are generally a little larger, maybe not as remarkable in terms of their color, and maybe a little less perfect, and then in the back you'll see more of a rubble. It just took so long, and was so labor-intensive, that they wouldn't collect all the stones they'd need to make a prefect house on all 4 sides.

This is a close-up that shows the [Ticknor house's] herringbone pattern. It also shows the defined border, and the joints they kept in between. It's thought that there was a professional tool that created that, to lay a pattern. It took a lot of time and effort. This shows the right side, the herringbone pattern, and on the left side a little less in the way it's placed. And then the back; they used rubble to create that.

And this house had a porch on it, some people remember that. I remember when I was on the Cobblestone board, and there was some talk about what kind of porch it was. The city manager said, "Well, what about this? What about that big porch I used to see driving by?" The board said, "Oh no, that wasn't on it originally, that's an Italianate porch." Some of you may remember driving along Packard back when this house did have the porch, so it just brings back memories in our lifetime.

This is the Orrin White House that is the oldest one in the county, and you see it has the same herringbone pattern. That's why we think the two of them were both built by Stephen Mills, and there's also a granddaughter or great-granddaughter who said that she was always told that her grandfather or great-grandfather built this house. That's not proof positive for a Ph.D., but that's the kind of stuff you have to go with with local history; that's pretty close to to the best we can do.

Orrin White's 1836 Federal-style home at 2940 Fuller Rd. is the oldest cobblestone structure in the county.

This is the house that's across from Huron [high school]. The back side of it is laid on the Huron River, and you can see the stones, they were more rounded, so they were cobblestone.

When I got active on the cobblestone farm board, Nan Hodges lived in that house, and that's how she got interested. When [the Ticknor] house was in danger of being torn down because the city was building a park here and everything, she was one of the organizers of the movement that saved this cobblestone house. And she did a lot of research on her house; she found some sort of remembrance of of Orrin White in 1891 remembering when he was a little kid and helping to burn the limestone and helping collect the stones. Another thing that's in common with a lot of these houses is that it's often important people that lived in them, because this house had a doctor, a naval surgeon. Orrin White was a state representative, and he was also county sheriff and an important guy in the community. So it does take a certain person to say "I'm going to build this wonderful house, and it's going to take me 7 years to build."

[Thanks to the efforts of local historians, those scant 7 years have resulted in a rich 170-year-old heritage of Washtenaw county cobblestone structures. Grace and Pat wound up their talk with a quick survey of local structures, then took questions from the fascinated audience].

Mark Your Calendar

On June 10 & 11, the Waterloo Area Farm Museum will have its first-ever **"Woodland Indians Reenactment."** Historical reenactors depict everyday family life of the woodland Indians who lived in this area. The camp, from the 1750–1763 era, is complete with lodges and a French fur trader's post. Also, a sundown ceremony.

10 a.m.-dusk, $2 (children ages 5–17, $1). (517) 851-7890. Waterloo Area Farm Museum, 9998 Waterloo-Munith Rd. (left at the dead end of Clear Lake Rd.).

19th Century Cobblestone Buildings In Washtenaw County

1. **Alvord House,** 10331 Grossman Road, Manchester Twp.
   1860s Italianate originally owned by Obed Alvord of NY.
2. **Burnett House,** 3555 W. Delhi Rd., Scio Twp.
   1840s Greek Revival owned by William Burnett of NY.
3. **Jewett House,** 10725 Jerusalem Rd., Lima Twp.
   1847 Federal owned by Lester Jewett of NY.
4. **Knight House,** 4944 Scio Church Rd., Scio Twp.
   1849 Federal owned by Rufus Knight of NY.
5. **Leland House,** 7374 Sutton Rd., Northfield Twp.
   1840s Greek Revival owned by Orrison Leland of NY.
6. **McCormick House,** 5400 Curtis Rd., Salem Twp.
   1851 Federal owned by Robert McCormick of NY.
7. **Miles House,** 219 n. Huron, Ypsilanti.
   1845 Greek Revival/Queen Anne owned by Loren Miles of ?
8. **Pierce House,** 4659 Prospect Hill Rd., Sharon Twp.
   1840s Greek Revival owned by Myron Pierce of ?
9. **Richmond House,** 3562 W. Huron River Dr., Scio Twp.
   1840s Greek Revival owned by Morris Richmond of NY.
10. **Taylor House,** 2385 Baker Rd., Scio Twp.
    1840s Greek Revival owned by obed Taylor of MA.
11. **Ticknor House,** 2781 Packard Rd., Ann Arbor.
    1844 Federal owned by Benajah Ticknor of CT.
12. **White House,** 2940 Fuller Rd., Ann Arbor.
    1836 Federal owned by Orrin White of NY.

Humorous Tidbits Gleaned from Chapman's 1881 "History of Washtenaw County"

"Too much praise cannot be given to such fine women, for if they receive not a share of this enviable meed they will vanish out of sight and a nondescript race will succeed them worth nothing."

"After his marriage he moved to different points in the state of New York."

"The angel of death once more laid his cold and clammy hand on the wife of his bosom."

"When about 20 years old he had a cousin about the same age who was all for living without hard work. He called Mr. S. a fool for working so hard. The cousin died in Detroit penniless. Mr. S., now 84 years old, acquired over 360 acres of land, thus showing his better course of work over idleness."

"They joined in matrimony in the ordinary fashion."

"A pioneer minister, a man of large physical nature."

19th-Century Coursed Cobblestone Buildings In Michigan

Information courtesy Grace Shackman and Patricia Majher. See p. 6 for list of cobblestone buildings in Washtenaw County).

Barry County. Blaisdell House, 298 Eaton Rd., Castleton Twp.

Calhoun County. Barney House, 303 S. Hillsdale St., Homer

Lake House, 29680 Albion Rd., Albion Twp.

White House, 20744 M-66, Pennfield Twp.

Hillsdale County. Kirby House, 3771 State Rd., Adams Twp. Vandenburd House, 180 N. Wolcott St., Hillsdale

Wilbutr House, 4481 State Rd., Adams Twp.

Ionia County. Sessions School, Riverside Dr. at Jordan Lake Rd., Berlin Twp.

Jackson County. Coolbaugh House, Michigan Ave. at Church St., Parma Hamlin House, 200 Main St., Concord Hurd House, 7632 N. Meridian Rd., Henrietta Twp.

McConnell House, 822 Woodworth, Blackman Twp.

Miles House, 12797 Kalmbach Rd., Grass Lake Twp.

Wolcott House, 6707 Cross Rd., Spring Arbor Twp.

Lenawee County. Eddy House, 11700 N. Adrian Rd., Franklin Twp.

Macon District No. 1 School, 8225 Clinton-Macon Rd., Macon

Wheeler House, 7075 M-50, Cambridge Twp.

Livingston County. Rumsey House, 5070 E. Highlalnd Rd., Osceola Twp.

Sawyer House, 8051 M-36, Green Oak Twp.

Monroe County. Osgood House, 744 Samaria Rd., Bedford Twp.

Oakland County. Beach House, 7980 Hickory Ridge Trail, Rose Twp.

Dudley House, 880 Snell Rd., Oakland Twp.

Garner House, 5355 White Lake Rd., White Lake Twp.

Holmes House, 324 S. Main St., Milford

Sprague Building, 300 S. Main St., Rochester

Taylor House, 487 E. Gunn Rd., Oakland Twp.

Terry House, 3151 University Dr., Auburn Hills

St. Joseph County. Nottawa Stone School, Michigan 86 and Filmore Rds., Nottawa Twp.

Vern Messler of the Historic Bridge Park in Battle Creek and Aaron Berkholz of the Washtenaw County Road Commission gave a talk on historic wrought iron truss bridges at the museum's February 25 Open House. The exhibit may be viewed until June 7, 2006.

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET
A Museum Of County Life

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SUNDAY • 2 PM
APRIL 23, 2006

JOINT MEETING OF GSWC & WCHS
"GSWC & WCHS STORY"
SPEAKERS • MARCIA MCCRARY & JUDITH CHRISMAN

ST. JOSEPH MERCY HOSPITAL
EDUCATION CENTER
PARKING LOT "P"
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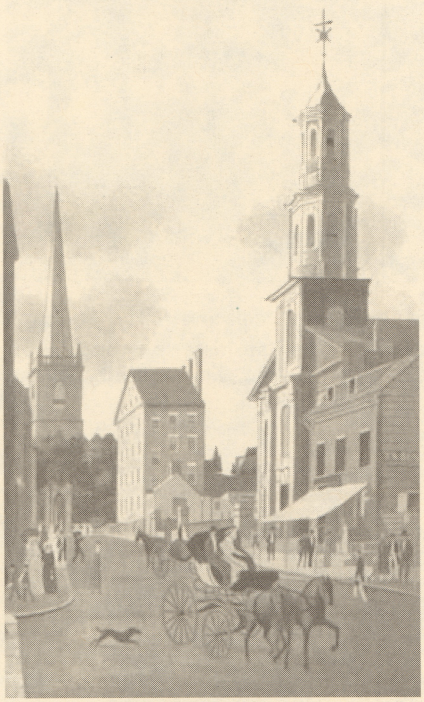
Program Schedule 2006



Sunday, March 19 • 2 pm
NAME ORIGINS
OF LOCAL STREETS/ROADS
Speaker: *Jeff Mortimer*
Location: University Commons, 817 Asa Gray, Ann Arbor

Sunday, April 23 • 2 pm
GSWC & WCHS STORY
Speaker: *Marcia McCrary*
Location: SJMH Education Center, Parking Lot 'P'

Sunday, May 21 • 4 pm
WCHS ANNUAL MEETING
Potluck supper & election of officers
Location: Dixboro United Methodist Church, 5221 Church St., Dixboro

Suggestions appreciated
Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Washtenaw County Historical Society is to foster interest in and to elucidate the history of Washtenaw County from the time of the original inhabitants to the present. Its mission shall be to carry out the mandate as stated through the preservation and presentation of artifacts and information by exhibit, assembly, and publication. And to teach, especially our youth, the facts, value and the uses of Washtenaw County history through exhibits in museums and classrooms, classes, tours to historical places, and other educational activities.